
Article:
O'Brien, Thomas Anthony orcid.org/0000-0002-5031-736X (2014) Perceptions and Expectations : Divergent Approaches to Understanding Social Movement Outcomes. Social Movement Studies. pp. 108-112. ISSN 1474-2837

https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2014.903169

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Social Movement Studies on 1 April 2014, available online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2014.903169

Review Essay

Perceptions and Expectations: Divergent Approaches to Understanding Social Movement Outcomes

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Social Movements and the New State: The Fate of Pro-Democracy Organizations When Democracy is Won

Brian K. Grodsky

Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2012, x + 205pp., $80.00, ISBN 9780804782319 (hardback), $24.95, ISBN 9780804782326 (paperback).

Forging Rights in a New Democracy: Ukrainian Students between Freedom and Justice

Anna Fournier

Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, ix + 214pp., £59.95, ISBN 9780812244267 (hardback), £59.95, ISBN 9780812207453 (ebook).

Unintended Outcomes of Social Movements: The 1989 Chinese Student Movement

Fang Deng

London, Routledge, 2011, xiii + 152pp., £100.00, ISBN 9780415779333 (hardback), £28.00, ISBN 9780415822633 (paperback).

Social movements can play an important role in pushing for regime change and democratisation. The recent events of the Arab Spring demonstrated the ability of popular discontent to topple seemingly impervious non-democratic rulers (Nuruzzaman, 2013; Volpi, 2013). These events followed those in the post-communist region, labelled the Colour Revolutions, where organised social movements pressured authoritarian regimes to relinquish power or use force to maintain order (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). The outcomes in each demonstrate the importance of perceptions and expectations on the part of regime elites and citizens, as well as external supporters. In such situations, these actors must calculate the chances of success and costs associated with failure. Lessons from the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring have also raised questions regarding the relative significance of organised movements as opposed to more spontaneous and distributed movements for change. Finally, the mobilisation of opposition can lead to regime change, but the outcome of such change is much less certain.

The three books considered in this essay examine movements for democracy from differing perspectives. Fang Deng's book analyses the series of events that led to the repression of the Chinese student movement in 1989, asking why "violent suppression [occurred]… despite the fact that both the Chinese state and the activists wanted very much to avoid violent confrontation?" (p. 10) Brian Grodsky explores the organisational consequences for democracy movements following successful achievement of their goal, considering the cases of Poland, South Africa, and Georgia. Finally, Anna Fournier adopts an anthropological approach to assess how high school students in Ukraine understand their rights and

responsibilities as citizens during a period of political change. Although these books address divergent issues, they are united by their consideration of the role of social movements in mobilising support for democratisation, and what this means for participants as well as those being challenged.

Mobilising Support to Challenge the Regime

Generating sufficient support to challenge a non-democratic regime is a significant challenge for any movement. Grodsky notes that the legitimacy of the movement is central to its ability to build and maintain support for its goal. The movements he considers tended to centre on a small number of key movement actors who were able to organise and generate broader mobilisations. In a similar vein to Bunce and Wolchik (2011), Grodsky argues that the support of external actors who provided funding and advocacy also played an important role in enabling the respective movements to claim legitimacy. The contrast with the 1989 student movement in China is striking. Although the students were able to generate support and mobilise within their own milieu, they attracted limited direct external support from society and outside China. This can be partially linked to the more spontaneous and ad-hoc approach driven by the actions of the regime in tightly restricting "free spaces – areas outside state control and surveillance" (Johnston, 2011: p. 102). In this way there is a clear divide, with the Chinese student movement more closely resembling the opposition that toppled the regimes in the Arab Spring.

In view of the need for support from the population, Anna Fournier presents an interesting and novel perspective that can aid in understanding how this support arises. Working with school students during a period of democratisation, she identifies uncertainty as a central theme, as citizens (students) are unable to develop firm expectations about the role of the

state while negotiating a shifting external environment. In describing the effect of the environment on individual actions, Fournier argues that "the blurring of intentionality and randomness in everyday experience… resulted in chance (as a realm of the everyday) seemingly losing its autonomy." (p. 109) The removal of chance under the authoritarian regime reinforces the notion of control from above. Grodsky and Deng also identify uncertainty as being central to the decision to mobilise and support opposition to the regime, bringing severe costs in the case of the Chinese student movement. The possibility of change embodied by the movement is therefore essential in presenting a counter to the lived social reality.

The decision of individuals in the cases considered to mobilise and support opposition movements, despite the risks involved, was driven by the promise of freedom. Fournier argues that the "Orange Revolution constituted the promise of 'freedom within the law [*svoboda*]' rather than 'freedom outside the law [*volia*]'" (p. 173), thereby addressing the arbitrariness of authoritarian rule. This claim of individual agency is central to Deng's analysis, with the argument that sociological theories are too focused on the context, not allowing sufficient room for individual and public choices. The decision to participate in an opposition movement involves the conscious exercise of individual agency. Drawing distinctions between the cases he examines, Grodsky argues that opposition movements in Poland and South Africa were driven very clearly by longstanding movements, and people's decisions to participate in the face of potential threats. In Georgia by contrast, opposition was supported by external actors and based around foreign-funded professionalised NGOs, potentially limiting broader involvement, arguably reducing their ability to influence the new regime. The role of agency in shaping outcomes is essential, as it allows movements to break free from the constraints imposed by the regime and social expectations.

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Elite Responses to Mobilisation

Movements for democracy do not operate in a vacuum and must take into consideration the actions and reactions of elite actors when faced with opposition. In all of the cases considered, the state sought to maintain some degree of control prior to and following the mobilisation of opposition movements. The strategies adopted to do so varied considerably. When faced with the student movement, the Chinese state sought to demobilise the protests without resorting to the use of force, which would bring international condemnation. The final suppression of the movement in Tiananmen Square is argued to result from the fact that the movement "overlooked the government's messages and many signs of government preparation for the military crackdown" (Deng, 2011: p. 135). This failure resulted from the previous actions of the state, backing down rather than following through on threats, thereby giving the impression of space for the movement to press its challenge. Returning to the earlier theme, uncertainty is apparent on both sides, as each seeks to strengthen their overall position in a zero-sum context.

The open repression of opposition movements in such cases is a rarer and more extreme result that generally follows the failure of other methods of control. In the communist states, and South Africa, Grodsky argues that "leaders balanced various forms of political repression with economic carrots designed to increase their legitimacy." (p. 39) These actions reinforce the notion that the state turns to the use of outright repression only in times of significant threat. When faced with growing opposition, Fournier argues that the Ukrainian regime turned to subtler forms of control, policing the opposition movement and attempting to discredit their candidate (Viktor Yushchenko). The attempted poisoning that led to Yushchenko's disfigurement during the campaign was linked to subsequent opposition

attempts to 'deface' posters of Viktor Yanukovich "to show what his detractors considered his 'real' face" (Fournier, 2012: p. 164). The different strategies adopted by elites point to the difficulties in containing and managing opposition movements and the extent to which they will go to maintain order.

The other issue that emerges with regard to elite responses to mobilisation is that of communication. In the absence of open channels for communication with the opposition and given the desire of the regime to maintain order, communicating expectations and potential repercussions is more difficult. While the Chinese regime sought to limit the effects of the student movement on the wider society, Deng argues that its actions and the willingness to use violence as a last resort were not sufficiently communicated to the movement activists. Drawing on game theory, he illustrates the mechanisms that allowed the conflicting interpretations of the respective actions to form leading to escalation and ultimately repression. By contrast, in Georgia, "the state invented various commissions to create the appearance of cooperation" (Grodsky, 2012: p. 107) as a way of establishing control and communicating accepted practice. Although reforms were intended to control and limit civil society groups, they provided an opening and opportunity for the opposition to coalesce and develop legitimacy. Attempts by the regime to maintain order were undermined by the application of blanket control that made any loosening of restrictions appear as an opportunity to push for further change.

Challenges of Success and Failure

The outcome of social movement actions has become an issue of increasing importance in recent times as a way of judging the significance and effectiveness of the actions undertaken (see Bozi and Uba, 2009). The cases considered in the three books demonstrate the wide

diversity of possible outcomes from democracy (Poland and South Africa), continued non-democratic rule (China) or some form of semi-democracy (Georgia and Ukraine). Grodsky's analysis of the outcomes of social movement success is the clearest, as he considers in detail what happens when a movement achieves its ultimate goal and displaces the existing regime. In such cases it is argued that "high expectations of support based on former beliefs and bonds… fit awkwardly in the new institutional context." (Grodsky, 2012: p. 22) The diversity of interests and actors that are mobilised to generate opposition to a non-democratic regime also present the greatest challenge to maintaining order and cohesion once the goal has been achieved. This is illustrated by the experience of Solidarity in Poland, which withdrew from politics following three attempts to participate resulted in tensions between the organisation and former members in positions of power.

While success can bring costs and difficulties for the movement, the effects on society itself can be more long-lasting and positive. Fournier notes that the apparent failure of the Orange coalition (losing parliamentary and presidential elections in 2006 and 2010 respectively) is a setback, rather than a failure. The experience of students participating in the protests exposed them to new ideas and possibilities and that the "first post-Soviet generation's engagement with rights in their textbooks, in the media, and on the streets cannot be easily undone" (Fournier, 2012: p. 183). Considering the fate of the movements Grodsky examined and the Orange coalition it is clear that success may be seen as a natural endpoint for historic organisations and movements, with an expectation within society that new organisations will emerge to undertake roles associated with the emerging democratic system. The recent wave of protest actions in Ukraine (2013-2014) may reinforce this notion, as opposition to perceived injustices arises as and when it is needed (see Whitmore, 2013).

The challenges of movement failure are also long-lasting and more serious for those involved in opposing the non-democratic regime. The emergence of the Chinese student movement resulted from an apparent limited liberalisation by the regime that was capitalised on students. As noted above, the willingness of the regime to tolerate limited opposition was driven in part by the desire to avoid international condemnation. In this case the failure of the movement to recognise the dynamics facing the regime led to overstretching and ultimately suppression. In reconstructing the events that led to the repression of the student movement, Fang Deng uses game theory to reinforce the notion that decisions taken by individual actors or groups impact on other actors who are forced to respond. The violent repression that resulted in 1989 did indeed spark international condemnation, yet did not result in a change in stance by the regime. While opposition to a non-democratic regime can bear fruit, if a regime feels that such opposition poses an existential threat it is not willing to allow, repression is a likely outcome.

Conclusion

These three books provide differing approaches to the perceptions and expectations that are embedded within social movement activities. Together they demonstrate the difficulties that face movements when trying to understand and challenge the actions of the state in situations of imperfect information. The state is rightly presented as possessing agency and a desire to withstand and control challenging movements. However, as Deng identifies, decisions made by the state are complex, determined through multiple interactions with the oppositional movement. Lack of certainty regarding state actions can lead to choices that harm the longevity of the movement and, in more extreme cases, the safety of members. The apparently successful cases examined by Fournier and Grodsky also demonstrate that removing a non-democratic regime may present new challenges to the movement relating to

future orientation and goals. Together the cases examined in these books enable a more complete understanding of the decisions taken by movements and the effects on external actors (supporting and opposing). These are important considerations, since success or failure is largely dependent on the ability of a particular movement to influence other participants to act or refrain.

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